

Random Encounters

All Adrift on the Dune Sea

By Skip Williams



Birds of a Feather

Deep in the Dune Sea, a stony ridge rises from the sand like a long, thin island. Hawks, vultures, and a host of other birds gather here each morning to catch an updraft that develops above the rocks. Most of the birds hang around here just long enough to gain altitude before soaring away over the dunes in search of richer pickings elsewhere. If the PCs get a look at the place around sunrise, they see hundreds of birds climbing in lazy spirals.

A quartet of hieracosphinxes has moved in here. Rather than join the soaring birds, they've decided to hunker down in the rocks so as to stay out of sight while they wait to see what beings happen along. A vast slope of wind-packed sand surrounds the ridge. When the PCs cross this open area, the sphinxes easily spot them. Once they spy the PCs, they take to the air and approach the groups. They fly low and use the rocky outcrops to stay out of sight so they can surprise the group. If the PCs take precautions to avoid being seen, such as becoming invisible before crossing the slope, they can cross the ridge without being seen and they delay meeting the hieracosphinxes for a few days.

Sooner or later, the hieracosphinxes get tired of waiting in the rocks and take wing to look for prey farther afield. Being tireless hunters, eventually they locate the party, but the PCs probably will see them coming at least a few rounds before they come close enough to begin their attack.

In either case, the sphinxes close in from two directions. They keep to the air and make flyby attacks. After they soften up the party a little, they begin using their pounce attacks. They also pounce on anyone they find separated from the main group by more than 40 feet. The sphinxes attack partly from hunger and partly from the desire to claw something to bits. They're reluctant to accept defeat, and most of them fight to the death. If the PCs kill three of the sphinxes, the lone survivor flees if it has been reduced to less than half its hit points.

Hieracosphinxes (4): hp 67 each; see *Monster Manual* page 234.

Bringing the Parts Together

The PCs might have found traces of the hieracosphinxes in "Mummies by Moonlight." The gynosphinxes in "Not Exactly a Thorn in His Paw" might also have warned the PCs about the hieracosphinxes. If the PCs capture a hieracosphinx, the creature isn't willing to talk. It has seen (and raided) the nomad encampment "A Taste of Desert Hospitality," but the sphinx won't reveal what it knows unless bribed or intimidated. The sphinx doesn't know much. Five hieracosphinxes attacked the nomads a few days ago; the flock found the nomads and their animals easy pickings until the tribal spellcasters showed up and began working magic. One sphinx literally dropped dead, and the remainder decided to escape. The survivors were still smarting from the defeat, and that's why they attacked the party so ferociously. (The "tribal spellcasters" were actually lamias. They used a *deep slumber* spell on one of the sphinxes, which fell to its death.) Unless questioned closely, the sphinx doesn't bother to tell the PCs that the "spellcasters" weren't human.

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